

REMARKS:

In the Office Action, claims 1-13 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Tateyama et al in view of WO 98/19333, Hansen et al and Miller. Applicants respectfully submit that the claims should be patentable over the cited references. Current claim 1 is produced below in verbatim:

1. A wafer conveyance system for transporting one or more wafers that undergo, while being transported, different processes at a plurality of wafer processing apparatuses, each wafer processing apparatus defining a self-contained environment in its inside which provides a controlled atmosphere in which one or more wares are processed, the wafer conveyance system comprising:

- (a) a hermetically closed chamber that provides an isolated environment that is in communication with the inside of each wafer processing apparatus through a passage;
- (b) at least one guide path provided inside the chamber;
- (c) at least one mobile element being movable inside the chamber along the guide path to transport one or more wafers from one wafer processing apparatus to another; and
- (d) at least one arm provided on each mobile element, each arm being accessible to the inside of each wafer processing apparatus through a corresponding passage to load one or more wafers into a wafer processing apparatus and unload the same therefrom.

In claim 1, each wafer processing apparatus defines a self-contained environment in its inside, and each self-contained environment provides a controlled atmosphere in which wafers are processed. Claim 1 further includes a hermetically closed chamber that provides an isolated environment, and this hermetically closed chamber is in communication with the inside of each wafer processing apparatus through a passage. Loading a wafer onto a wafer processing apparatus and unloading the same therefrom are performed through the passage. These features are not disclosed or taught by any of Tateyama et al, WO 98/19333, Hansen et al and Miller. Therefore, claim 1 should be allowable over these cited references. Since claim 1 should be allowable, claims 2-13, which depend directly and indirectly from claim 1, should also be allowable.

Respectfully submitted,



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